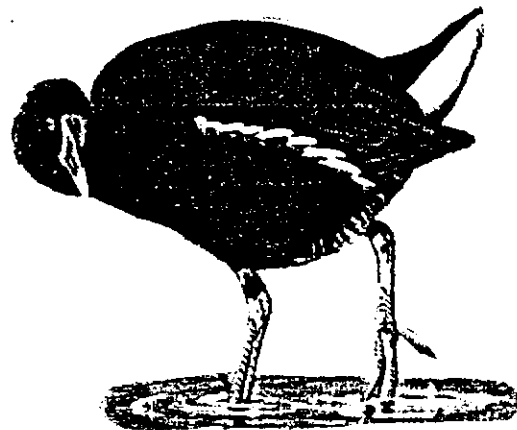


MASSACHUSETTS RARE AND ENDANGERED WILDLIFE

COMMON MOORHEN (Gallinula chloropus)

DESCRIPTION

The Common Moorhen is a duck-like swimming bird about 13" (32cm) long. Its body is slate-grey with a prominent red bill with a yellow tip and a red frontal shield. Its tail cocks up and is white beneath. The voice of the Common Moorhen is a series of clucks or a squawking scream similar to that of the American Coot (Fulica americana). Nestlings are black and downy with the red bill with yellow tip, but lack the frontal shield.



SIMILAR SPECIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

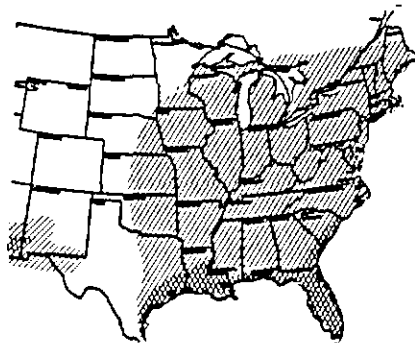
The American Coot is about the same size and is slate-grey, but it has a conspicuous white bill unlike the red bill of the Common Moorhen. Also, the American Coot is often found in open water, while the Common Moorhen keeps to dense vegetation. Rails (Rallus spp.) may be found in the same marsh habitat, but they generally have a brown body and a long bill. They are even more secretive than the Common Moorhen and are very rarely flushed out of dense vegetation.

Forbush, E.H. Birds of Massachusetts.
Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1929.

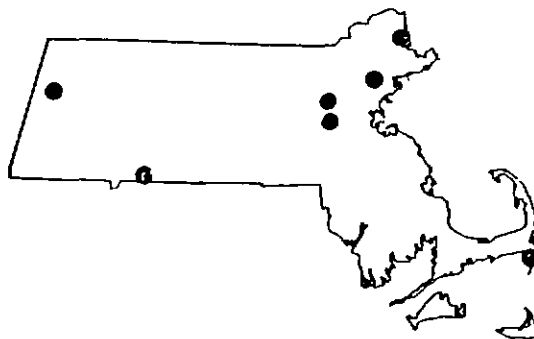
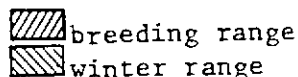
LIFE HISTORY IN MASSACHUSETTS

The Common Moorhen inhabits large freshwater marshes and ponds with cattails (Typha spp.) and other emergent vegetation. It generally keeps to the cover of dense vegetation and feeds by wading or diving at the edges of open water. Its food is

(continued overleaf)



Range of Gallinula chloropus



- Verified since 1978
- Reported prior to 1978

Breeding Distribution in Massachusetts
by Town

COMMON MOORHEN (continued)

mostly made up of grass and sedge seeds and insects.

The Common Moorhen arrives in Massachusetts from the south during late April or May, and returns to its southern wintering range in October. Nesting begins throughout May into early June. It builds its nest of dead marsh plants to form a bulky platform that is usually at the shore edge or floating in dense vegetation.

The female lays 5-12 eggs that are buff or greyish to cinnamon-brown and have reddish-brown or greyish spots. Incubation is carried out by either parent and last for about 21 days. The male cares for the first-hatched chicks while the female incubates the remaining eggs. Young leave the nest very soon after hatching, can feed independently in 3 weeks, and can fly in 6-7 weeks, though they remain with the parents for some time thereafter.

RANGE

The Common Moorhen breeds from Maine to Minnesota, south to Florida and eastern Texas. It also breeds in the west from southern Oregon to Mexico. Its wintering range is from eastern South Carolina through Florida and along the Gulf coast.

POPULATION STATUS IN MASSACHUSETTS

The Common Moorhen is a species of Special Concern in Massachusetts. Only 8 currently verified sites (since 1978) have been identified in Massachusetts, and 1 additional historical site is recorded. Current breeding population in Massachusetts is estimated at between 11 and 20 pairs.

Since 1985, the hunting season on the Common Moorhen has been closed. Historically, hunting pressure on Common Moorhen has been light in Massachusetts and is unlikely to have affected its population status. The loss of significant amounts of shallow freshwater marsh habitat through drainage and development may be responsible for the decline in population of the Common Moorhen in Massachusetts.